



# F-35 Lightning II Program

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## 1ST LUKE F-35 PILOT TRAINING AT EGLIN

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**LUKE AIR FORCE BASE, Ariz.** -- Flying is a concept that captures the imagination of some people at a very young age; hence the success of characters like Peter Pan, Superman and even a flying house in the 2009 movie "Up."

Few get to realize that dream, but Capt. Joshua Arki, a 61st Fighter Squadron instructor pilot and chief of weapons and tactics, realized his dream by first mastering flight in an F-16 Fighting Falcon and has now been selected as the first Luke Air Force Base F-16 pilot to transition to the F-35 Lightning II joint strike fighter, scheduled to arrive at Luke early this year.

"The decision was made that the first pilot to transition had to be the new squadron's chief of weapons and tactics," said Lt. Col. Shamsher Mann, 62nd Fighter Squadron commander. "We needed it to be an Air Force Weapons School graduate. The list was further arrowed based on rank and time on station. We also needed someone who demonstrated superior instructional skills and the competence to take on the daunting task of defining new tactics for a new fighter while building the initial crop of F-35 pilots for the Air Force."

While there were other contenders, Arki met all criteria and was chosen for the big job, Mann said.

It is bittersweet to give up flying the F-16, Arki said, describing the Fighting Falcon as the greatest multirole fighter ever. But he has hopes of helping the F-35 to meet and maybe surpass that legacy one day.

"There are only a small number of pilots qualified on the F-35, so we are literally creating and testing tactics on a daily basis," he said.

Arki is currently TDY to Eglin AFB, Fla., where he is learning the ins and outs of the F-35. As an instructor pilot with the 62nd FS for the past four years, it was an adjustment for him to get in the mindset of being a student again.

"I'm learning a lot from the Eglin instructors, and hope to bring back to Luke many of their lessons-learned," Arki said. "I'm currently in the academic and simulator phase of training, and will begin flying the F-35 in early February."

The former F-16 pilot is scheduled to return from training in March as he pioneers the future of flying the F-35 here at Luke.

"The battlefield dominance that the F-35 will bring to the table is eye-watering," Arki said. "The aircraft is amazing."

Arki was selected for this important role because of his ability to lead the way, Mann said.

"Luke pilots, along with their Eglin counterparts, will be on the leading edge of defining the tactical parameters of how the Air Force will fight with the F-35," the 62nd FS commander said. "Captain Arki has a lot riding on his shoulders. On those shoulders rests the initial trajectory of the combat training effectiveness of the F-35 when it arrives at Luke. Arki brings the right mix of formal training unit instructional experience and tactical forward thinking."